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ABSTRACT

Conference papers calling for newer constructs in organizational theory to explicate problems in understanding educational organizations were content analyzed to explore paradigmatic assumptions and to demonstrate a fit between assumptions. Papers supporting the use of qualitative methodologies were also analyzed. The papers were from the 1983 conferences of the American Educational Research Association and the Association for the Study of Higher Education. The underlying assumptions of organizational constructs such as "loose coupling" were analyzed and contrasted with older and more traditional constructions of organizations. The results show that assumptions grow typically out of the same, or a very similar, value framework; that effective methods of inquiry are those that match assumptions about organizations; and that methods that present reductionist pictures of organizations fail to inform the change process because they produce necessarily limited and nonholistic views of organizational functioning. It is suggested that increased interaction between organizational theorists and methodologists should insure that methods fit newer constructs to create a descriptive science of organizations. A list of the 11 conference papers and authors is included. (Author/SW)

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Bridging the Gap: New Constructs for Organizations and Appropriate Methodologies

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This paper was presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association for the Study of Higher Education held at the Conrad Hilton Hotel in Chicago, Illinois, March 12-14, 1984. This paper was reviewed by ASHE and was judged to be of high quality and of interest to others concerned with the research of higher education. It has therefore been selected to be included in the ERIC collection of ASHE conference papers.

ABSTRACT

Bridging the Gap: New Constructs for Organizations and Appropriate Methodologies

Eleven papers from the 1983 AERA and ASHE Conferences were content analyzed. The purpose was two-fold: 1) to explore paradigmatic assumptions, and 2) to demonstrate a fit between assumptions. The results show that assumptions grow typically out of the same, or a very similar, value framework; that effective methods of inquiry are those which match assumptions about organizations; and that methods which present reductionist pictures of organizations fail to inform the change process because they produce necessarily limited and nonholistic views of organizational functioning. Increased interaction between organizational theorists and methodologists should insure methods fit newer constructs to create a descriptive science of organizations.

BRIDGING THE GAP: NEW CONSTRUCTS FOR ORGANIZATIONS AND APPROPRIATE METHODOLOGIES

Introduction

Operating on the premise that there may be differences between what researchers are doing and what they say they are doing, the logics-in-use and reconstructed logics of contemporary researchers become a legitimate arena for inquiry in and of themselves. The intuitive and explicit links between linear and hierarchical models of the world ("reality") and building-block methods of research ("variables", "control", and "manipulation") have lent credence to cumulatively-oriented, erector-set models of research efforts. The synergism between world view, or proposed construction of reality, and requisite instructions for exploring it is intuitive. If that is true, then there ought to exist a concomitant expectation that newer models of reality should command new modes of exploration. The possibility or likelihood -- indeed, even the necessity -- of such a link is the topic of this research.

Problem

A survey of both ASHE and AERA (American Educational Research Association) programs for the past four years demonstrates an increasing concern with two areas of inquiry: newer constructs for organizations which move away from old notions of systems-oriented bureaucracies, and a preoccupation with the redress of balance between qualitative and quantitative methodologies as inquiry modes. Organizational theorists argue for studying newer dimensions of organizations (Weick, 1976; 1983; Astuto, Clark and Kuh, 1983) while others, predominantly methodologists, argue for expanded use of methods which emphasize verstehen or understanding

while de-emphasizing traditional rationalistic or scientific criteria of prediction and control (Conrad, 1983; Siverman, 1983; Guba and Lincoln, 1982). But no one has yet undertaken the task of demonstrating how, why, or indeed whether substantially different methodologies are appropriate for substantially different constructions of organizations.

Grounding in traditional scientific canons suggests ways in which quantitative methods are congenial with a convergent view of reality. Even if reality is not ultimately knowable (the naive realist's position) one can argue for attempting to approximate it by adding pieces which are "known". Similarly, non-conventional canons prod researchers to "know" utilizing methods which are more sympathetic to new canons.

Returning to the argument of logics-in-use versus reconstructed logics, however, it appears that research into organizations has not produced reflective treatment of method or world view (paradigm)[1] and likewise, exhortations on method have not produced lengthy treatment on world-view, or how method can contribute to different paths to "knowing". Without resorting to absolute violence toward avenues of research, it seems clear that organizational theorists have constructed new models and descriptions of organizational functioning as efforts to describe elements they saw as being deviations from horizontal or vertical input-process-output models. In like fashion, much of the press for "new" (actually, older) methods for research can be characterized as frustration responses to traditional inquiry's "precise answers to irrelevant questions"

[1]Indeed, this is not a new phenomenon. Nearly a century of excellent anthropological field work was reported without extensive reference to method or paradigmatic assumptions before the call to more self-conscious treatment of method was issued. And even then, treatment of field work issues was limited for another quarter-century to interviewing and participant observation.

(Tukey, attributed) and to open-minded experiments with symbolic interactionism and other reconstructions of social science. But the self-conscious treatment of method along with problem is rare in non-scientific, non-conventional inquiries.[2] And the press for more qualitative methods on the one hand and new theory in organizations on the other ought to be enough to convince even a casual observer that links can and do exist.

Objectives

The objectives of the research reported were threefold; 1) to analyze the underlying assumptions of organizational contructs such as "loose coupling" (Weick, 1976), "goal-independent planning" (Clark, 1982) and organized anarchy and garbage-can models of administration (March, Cohen and Olsen, 1974) to determine hallmarks of such views, and to contrast such views with older and more traditional constructions of organizations such (i.e., bureaucratic, vertically-linked, linear systems, and the like); 2) to examine underlying assumptions of proposed "newer", more ethnographically-oriented, case study, natualistic or qualitative methods; and 3) to propose some ways in which the fit between organizational constructs is synergistic with the assumptions of qualitative methodologies.

Theoretical Framework and Perspectives

The two perspectives adopted were those of Schwartz and Ogilvy (1979), who propose major paradigm shifts in traditional scientific and organizational disciplines (chemistry, holography, administrative science, psychology and the like) and Lincoln and Guba (forthcoming, 1984; 1982, 1981)

[2]In fact, until recently, it was sufficiently rare that editors of educational journals convened in a national meeting in June, 1981 in Bloomington, Indiana, to discuss ways of judging the technical adequacy and rigor of the flood of quantitative manuscripts proffered for publication.

who have attempted to build an epistemology based on such a paradigm shift which moves away from the logical positivist stance to a more phenomenological posture. In the latter perspective, this inquiry system is called "naturalistic inquiry", in contrast to rationalistic or conventional inquiry. Rationalistic or conventional inquiry is generally agreed to rest on the following five axioms: 1) reality is knowable, singular and convergent, separable into a series of steady states and processes (variables) which may be studied independently; 2) the nature of the subject-inquirer relationship is dualistic; 3) causality is linearly-conceived and necessary; 4) the object of inquiry is the verification of generalizations, time- and context-free laws which govern all behavior; and 5) inquiry is, or should be value-free. In sharp contrast to that set of axioms stands "naturalistic inquiry", constructed much as non-Euclidean geometries have been constructed: by turning classical axioms on their heads and exploring the implications. Its premises, or axioms, form a system whereby 1) reality is multiple and constructed rather than singular and convergent; 2) the nature of the subject-inquirer relationship is presumed to be interactive, rather than discrete and separable; 3) causality is mutual at best, cause-effect relationships are not linear, and plausible influences describe better why things occur; 4) working hypotheses replace generalizations in recognition of the influence of time and context on human behavior; and that 5) all inquiry is value bound, and cannot be separated from value decisions at several points: choice of context for research, choice of substantive theory, choice of problem, choice of method, inquirer's values and values which inhere in the context.

Schwartz and Ogilvy (1979) contend, for instance, that the dominant rationalistic or scientific paradigm has been characterized by a world-view which assumes the world is simple/probabilistic, governed by hierarchy and vertical orderings (both in the natural and the social world), and that the universe is mechanical, determinate and liked in linearly causal ways, characterized by an "assembly" motif, and knowable through objectivity.

The emergent paradigm, they have asserted, postulated a quite different world, the hallmarks of which are complexity/diversity, heterarchy, holographic images, indeterminacy, mutual causality, morphogenesis and a "perspectival" view of knowing. This shift, they argued, is eminently visible in biology, in physics, in mathematics and in other formal disciplines (including those mentioned above and, additionally, the arts, philosophy, political theory, brain theory and the like). The importance of tracking an emergent world-view through dozens of formal disciplines is that it has suggested that perfectly sensible and sane people give every evidence of shifting their belief systems regarding the nature of the universe. From Thom's catastrophe theory to non-evolutionary theories of biological occurences, to Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle, to holography, to the heterarchic theories of political organization, the evidence of a new paradigm is powerful.

In a parallel shift, educational researchers and other social scientists who study postsecondary education, have begun to call for additional (Cook and Reichardt, 1979), extended (Miles and Huberman, forthcoming, 1984), or radically different methodologies (Guba, 1984, forthcoming) with which to investi-

gate institutions and schools.

Methods and Techniques

The method was a simple and rather straightforward documentary or content analysis of eleven papers. Some of those papers represented a call for, or use of, newer constructs in organizational theory to explicate problems in understanding educational organizations. The others represented support for, or instances of, the use of qualitative methodologies (over quantitative methods) in investigating postsecondary institutions. All of the papers were presented at either the American Educational Research Association or the Association for the Study of Higher Education in the spring of 1983. Underlying assumptions were sought, and were displayed against both emergent-paradigm descriptions of Schwartz and Ogilvy, and fundamental epistemological shifts outlined by Lincoln and Guba.

Content analysis, as treated by Holsti (1969), Krippendorf (1983) and Rosengren (1981; see particularly his treatment of qualitative versus quantitative content analyses, pp. 10-12), is generally "any technique for making inferences by objectively and systematically identifying specified characteristics of messages" (Holsti, 1969, p. 14). The coding of data for a content analysis involves systematically transforming and aggregating raw data into units (categories or taxonomies) "which permit precise descriptions of relevant content characteristics" (Holsti, 1969, p. 94). Data sources in this

instance were the collected A.E.R.A. and A.S.H.E. papers; raw data were the items (words, phrases, sentences and parts of paragraphs) drawn from the sources, transcribed onto 3 x 5 cards, then sorted or "dealt" into "look-alike" piles.

Since content anaysis is a rule-guided method, decision rules were created to guide the initial sort. So, for instance, the first sort produced four categories: a pile of cards with data items which were clearly organization-load; a stack which was exclusively method-load; a third pile, later labelled emotive or metaphoric; and a fourth catagory, mixed load. For example, in the first category, sample data items were:

> "the classic elements of organizational design such as hierarchical structure, formalization, rationality, and specialization are important"
>
> "shared governance and collegiality are participatory management"
>
> "(Weber's) discussion of organizational elements began with offices and positions arranged vertically and horizontally to reflect line, staff and co-equal relationships"

In the second category, sample data items were:

> "the requirements of theoretical saturation have been met"
>
> "the analysis moves increasingly from comparing data incident with data incident to comparing the data with properties of the concepts that have been abstracted during the comparison on incidents"
>
> "an analytical scheme used by ethnographers of communication to observe the progressive layerings of a text."

In the third category, the emotive or metaphoric, the following examples were found:

"alumni, parents and friends of an academic institution are considered responsible, dues-paying members of the academic family"

"totemism or the belief in kinship through a common affiliation does indeed operate in the academic community"

"One must look at educational processes as developed by individuals who descriptively and normatively bend space around themselves"

"(organizational culture) is a 'bass clef' that conveys at a deep level what management really cares about"

"Saga is the first window on organizational culture"

"the harmonizing, integrating and psychological supportive aspects of religious patterns...such as witchcraft...preserves social...structure rather than...destroys or transforms it"

"Witchcraft, however destructive it may seem at first glance, can demonstrably serve to focus impulses that affect cohesion"

In the fourth category, a small number of items not exclusively either organizational, methodological or metaphorical surfaced. Among these were:

"Saga is a 'collective understanding of unique accomplishment in a formally established group'."

"how a complex organization such as a research university creates and uses symbolic messages"

"clearly this image of tight and loose coupling is going to unpack into more discrete relationships than we will be able to imagine, or use, at any point in time."

Finally, the category decks were cross-referenced; the purpose of this was to check for instances where organizational theorists made reference to methodological needs or, conversely, where methodologists made reference to specific applications

in organizational research.

Results and Conclusions

The "fit", or resonance, between emergent organizational theory and emergent methodologies and epistemologies is powerful. The underlying concern in this conceptual task was to see whether or not those who call for expanded or substitute methods were, in fact, consciously or unconsciously calling for a different view of the organizations they studied, or conversely, to determine whether or not organizational theorists who propose radically different conceptions of organizations realized that investigating those conceptions would require different or expanded methods.

First, no one of the papers even broached the topic of paradigm shift. The meta-descriptors of Schwartz and Ogilvy--indeterminacy, mutual causality, heterarchy, and the like--would be foreign terminology to all but one or two of the authors. Some of those authors are primarily involved in self-described "perspectival" work (Clark 1983; Corcoran and Clark, 1983, a; b); others, because of their understanding of organizational functioning, might be adaptive with a holographic approach (Clark, Astuto & Kuh, 1983; Masland, 1983). But no single paper could be said to be the embodiment of an emergent paradigm.

Second, as might be expected, the organizational theory papers dealt somewhat more with methodological issues (nearly 12 times over 4 papers) than the methodologists with organi-

zational theory. This may reflect substantive or disciplinary interests, however. Nevertheless, it seems quite clear that both groups--while traveling parellel tracks--ought to be interacting at much greater length with each other. The organizational theorists who have seen a different vision of institutions, a more open, less tightly coupled structure, need to link their work more firmly with the methodologists, who have sensed the inadequacy and inappropriateness of former methods for achieving understanding (and therefore, for effecting change). These parallel universes could profit enormously from prolonged exchanges and attempts to make more explicit the link between the Gestalt of organizational theory and the methods used to explore organizational configurations. As Clark, Astuto and Kuh punned, "We have no strong preferences for strategies or techniques of inquiry. We think enough is known to support interesting a priori hypotheses which would attract individuals who prefer more conventional research methods. Intensive descriptive reports on organizational coupling are needed. Researchers predisposed to naturalistic inquiry should have a field day" (1983, p. 26).

Third, to deny there is a link between new theory on organizations and qualitative methods is counter-intuitive. The nature of the link is not clear, although points of contact will continue to surface. One avenue for exposing linkages though is the literary device used by some authors in this collection of papers: metaphor and/or simile. The

emotive power of analogous or poetic references to intimate resemblances not seen before may be significant. The strength of imagery to bespeak a way of seeing (and therefore of believing) is keen and cutting; we ought not to lose the edge.

Implications of the Research

It will be a given, for the moment, that such a link exists. And if so the implications of such a link--between current organizational theory and methodological shifts--are numerous. First, researchers cannot go on doing research into organizations and institutions the way we have in the past. In the future, we must match methods to characteristics of organizations which are observable (rather then theoretical). One lesson is that organizations which behave as loosely-coupled units do not lend themselves to study as tightly-coupled entities (at least not without violence to accurate portrayal of the organization).

Second, the nature of research questions must change. A second lesson to be learned is that until we have a new descriptive science of organizations and institutions (based on Verstehen rather than manipulations of variables) we operate at our peril in attempting control and/or change.

Third, methods which depended heavily on distillation (or reductionism) present necessarily one-sided and inadequate pictures of the operation and characteristics of organizations. Studying institutions holistically, while a more complex task,

is nevertheless more relevant to understanding how and why organizations exist, and how change within them is accomplished. This concept is particularly powerful in the management, for instance, of decline, where institutions may be called upon to make major changes in the interests of survival and attracting new student clienteles.

Finally, the link is important because it implies a value resonance--a direct, supportive and logical bridge between what one believes about institutions and how one either affirms or disconfirms those beliefs through systematic and disciplined study and research. A final lesson to be learned is that one cannot operate on two separate, distinct, and contradictory belief systems about the nature of the world: method must fit problem.

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